nounced among the mystically inclined. The Persian Sufi mystic Mansur Al-Hallaj (858–922), perhaps reasoning from his study of the Qur’an, said that Allah “has not created anything that is dearer to him than Muhammad and his family.” The renowned Sufi philosopher Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058–1111) declared that “the key to happiness is to follow the sunna and to imitate the Messenger of God in all his coming and going, his movements and rest, in his way of eating, his attitude, his sleep and his talk.”

Sometimes this devotion could not avoid excesses. The Persian poet Rumi (Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi, 1207–1273) said that the scent of roses was that of the sweat of the Prophet of Islam:

Root and branch of the roses is
the lovely sweat of Mustafa [that is, Muhammad],
And by his power the rose’s crescent
grows now into a full moon.

Likewise a modern Arab writer opined that Allah “created Muhammad’s body in such unsurpassable beauty as had neither before him nor after him been seen in a human being. If the whole beauty of the Prophet were unveiled before our eyes, they could not bear its splendor.”

This kind of thing is excessive, of course, but it only testifies to the centrality of Muhammad in Islamic piety. The contemporary scholar and mystic Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) ably summed up this centrality. Speaking of the virtues inculcated by Islam, he states: “It is inconceivable that these virtues could have been practiced through the centuries down to our time if the founder of Islam had not personified them in the highest degree…. For Muslims the moral and spiritual worth of the Prophet is not an abstraction or a supposition; it is a lived reality.”

**Imitating Muhammad today**

It is certain that mujahedeen throughout the world see Muhammad as the personification of the qualities they are trying to embody. His example cannot
be limited to his kindness to his companions and lack of harshness to his servants. When Muslims look to imitate him, they look to the same sources I have used in this book: the Qur’an, the Hadith, and the Sira. They have provided abundant evidence of this in recent years:

On March 28, 2003, the Palestinian Sheikh Muhammad Abu Al-Hunud warned in a sermon broadcast over Palestinian Authority television against those who would attempt to “mess with Allah’s book, to Americanize the region, Americanize the religion, Americanize the Koran, Americanize Muhammad’s message…” Any doubt that he meant by this that the Qur’an and Muhammad’s message would be stripped of their violent components were dispelled when he prayed about the Americans in Iraq: “Allah, make their possessions a booty for the Muslims, Allah, annihilate them and their weapons, Allah, make their children orphans and their women widows…”

On September 5, 2003, Sheikh Ibrahim Mudeiris invoked Muhammad’s battles when speaking of the Iraq war in another sermon broadcast by the Palestinian Authority, though his memory of the Battle of Tabuk was a bit faulty: “If we go back in the time tunnel 1400 years, we will find that history repeats itself… Byzantium represents America in the west… America will collapse, as Byzantium collapsed in the west… The Prophet [Muhammad] could, by means of unbroken ranks, conquer Byzantium, the greatest power compared to today’s America—and this without a single martyr falling from among the Muslims… The Prophet could, by means of the unity of the Muslim ranks and its awakening, defeat the America of that time… America is our No. 1 enemy, and we see it as our No. 1 enemy as long as we learn from the lessons of the Battle of Tabouk [which took place in
Muhammad’s legacy

October 630 AD]: ‘Make ready for them whatever you can of armed strength and of mounted pickets’ [Koran 8:60]. We are prepared and ready, but victory is from Allah. . .”’

On November 21, 2003, Muslims poured out of the Maiduguri Road Central Mosque after Friday prayers in the Nigerian city of Kaduna, demanding the implementation of sharia law and distributing flyers stating: “The only solution is Jihad, the type of jihad put into practice by Prophet Muhammad and exemplified by Shehu Usman Dan Fodio and the late Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran. We Muslims should unite and embrace this concept of jihad that will undoubtedly empower us to destroy oppression and oppressors, and in its place establish Islam.”

As late as November 2003, the website of the Islamic Affairs Department (IAD) of the Saudi Arabian embassy in Washington, D.C., contained exhortations to Muslims to wage violent jihad in emulation of Muhammad: “The Muslims are required to raise the banner of Jihad in order to make the Word of Allah supreme in this world, to remove all forms of injustice and oppression, and to defend the Muslims. If Muslims do not take up the sword, the evil tyrants of this earth will be able to continue oppressing the weak and [the] helpless. . .” It quotes Muhammad delivering Allah’s words: “Whoever of My slaves comes out to fight in My way seeking My pleasure, I guarantee him that I will compensate his suffering with reward and booty (during his lifetime) and if he dies, I would forgive him, have mercy on him and let him enter Paradise.”

In December 2003, an Iraqi jihad warrior explained why he was fighting against the American troops there: “The religious principle is that we cannot accept to live with infidels. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him, said, ‘Hit the
infidels wherever you find them.” The man was, of course, quoting not a saying of Muhammad but Qur’an 9:5, the “Verse of the Sword”—but it is easy to see why he would confuse the two.43

Fawwaz bin Muhammad Al-Nashami, the commander of the jihad group that killed twenty-two people in a jihad attack in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, on May 29, 2004, said that he acted in accord with Muhammad’s wishes for Arabia: “We are Mujahideen, and we want the Americans. We have not come to aim a weapon at the Muslims, but to purge the Arabian Peninsula, according to the will of our Prophet Muhammad, of the infidels and the polytheists who are killing our brothers in Afghanistan and Iraq… We began to comb the site looking for infidels. We found Filipino Christians. We cut their throats and dedicated them to our brothers the Mujahideen in the Philippines. [Likewise], we found Hindu engineers and we cut their throats too, Allah be praised. That same day, we purged Muhammad’s land of many Christians and polytheists.”44

In the run-up to the 2004 American presidential election, a Muslim preacher invoked Muhammad to denounce democracy: “Our Prophet did not run for office in any election…. He did not win any political debate. [Instead] he won the war against the infidel.”45

A jihadist explaining that the Israeli/Palestinian struggle was more than just a nationalist conflict over land declared: “But all of these people don’t realize that our struggle with the Jews goes way back, ever since the first Islamic state was established in Madeenah with Muhammad (SAWS) the Messenger sent to all of mankind, as its leader. Allaah has related to us in the Qur’an, the reality of the Jews’ malice and hatred for the ummah of Islaam and Tawheed, as he says: ‘You will
surely find that the people with the most enmity towards the believers are the Jews and the polytheists.” (Surah Al-Maa‘idah: 82) [Qur’an 5:82].

In October 2004, Sheikh Aamer Bin Abdallah Al-Aamer wrote this in the Al-Qaeda online journal Sawt al-Jihad: “Perform the Jihad against your enemies with your [own two] hands, sacrifice your souls and your property in fighting your enemy, as an imitation of [the acts of] your Prophet [Muhammad] in the month of Ramadan [and in order to] enrage your enemies.”

The influential American convert to Islam Hamza Yusuf in November 2004 invoked the Treaty of Hudaybiyya in exhorting Muslims to advance strategically toward their goals. “There are times when you have to live like a sheep,” he explained, “in order to live in the future like a lion.”

In a January 2005 article in Arab News, columnist Adil Salahi reminded his readers that Muhammad never made war on a people without first inviting them to convert to Islam: “During the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) lifetime the Muslim community had to fight many battles, because there were several sources of danger and many opponents who were keen to suppress the rising voice of the Islamic message. The Prophet made sure that in none of these battles the Muslims would exceed the limits of what is lawful in Islam. . . . [H]e would not launch an attack without alerting the enemy and calling on them to accept Islam and live in peace with the Muslim state.” (In May 2006, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran sent a letter to American president George W. Bush, a letter which he later explained was a call to Islam: “The letter was an invitation to monotheism and justice, which are common to all divine prophets. If the call is responded positively, there will be no more problems to be solved.”)
London Muslim leader Hani Al-Sibaai in February 2005 justified the slaughters being perpetrated by Al-Zarqawi’s mujahedin in Iraq: “Do these people base themselves on Islamic law or not? They claim that they do, and to support it, they say that slaughtering appeared in a hadith by the Prophet, which was pronounces authentic by Sheik Ahmad Shaker. The Prophet told the Quraysh tribe: ‘I have brought slaughter upon you,’ making this gesture. But these are religious issues that may be disputed…. [T]he Prophet drove nails into and gouged out the eyes of people from the ‘Urayna Tribe. They were merely a group of thieves who stole from sheep herders, and the Prophet drove nails into them and threw them into the Al-Hrara area, and left them there to die. He blinded them and cut off their opposite legs and arms. This is what the Prophet did on a trifling matter—let alone in war.”

As we saw in chapter eight, in July 2006 a writer on a British Muslim Internet forum declared: “I’m so fed up with these dirty, filthy Israeli dogs. May Allah curse them and destroy them all, and may they face the same fate as Banu Qurayzah!”

Most Western government and law enforcement officials would dismiss all this and similar examples as manifestations of the twisting or hijacking of Islam. But we have seen that all the words and deeds of Muhammad to which the jihadists refer are amply attested in early Islamic traditions. Nor is there a wealth of material in those traditions offering a radically different view of Muhammad.

This explains, of course, why Western officials refer confidently to mainstream Muslims who abhor terrorism and accept Western pluralism, but have so much trouble finding reliable spokesmen for this alleged majority. Such officials often place themselves in the peculiar position of maintaining that Muslim supporters of terror are only a tiny minority, but